

Support for Therapeutic Recreation

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Camp Easter Seal is a residential camping program for individuals from age six to eighty-five. It is completely barrier free and is the only camp of its kind in Saskatchewan. Camp Easter Seal hosts campers with intellectual and/or physical disabilities. Each camp session is 6 days long and is designed for a different age group and level of disability, with physical activity programming designed specifically for those individuals. In the summer of 2013, close to 700 campers attended Camp Easter Seal. For many campers, their time at Camp Easter Seal is something they look forward to all year long as an exceptional experience.

Camp Easter Seal's main objective is to identify and remove the barriers that would normally prevent individuals with a disability from participating in the physical activities that a typical summer camp experience involves. The need was identified in 1954 when the Saskatchewan Abilities Council saw a group of people without the ability to participate in a recreational summer camp experience because of their physical limitations. Programming at Camp Easter Seal is designed to benefit children and youth between the ages of 6 and 17 with physical disabilities as well as adults over the age of 18 with intellectual and/or physical disabilities. A goal of Camp Easter Seal is to allow these individuals to participate in activities that are normally offered at a summer camp, thus increasing their confidence and pride in who they are despite their varying abilities.

Camp Easter Seal has received a generous grant from the South Saskatchewan Community Foundation for the therapeutic riding program which gives campers not only the opportunity to spend time around horses but also to ride a horse in a safe and controlled environment. The benefits for a person with a physical disability are numerous. Riding a horse will certainly help to stretch and relax spastic (tight) muscles in the thighs. Getting up onto a horse will definitely require strength and coordination, and of course, one must not be afraid of heights.

For a rider with a learning or developmental disability, riding can improve memory retention, remembering the horse's names. Riding also provides social integration because it requires an awareness of socially appropriate behaviors and helps to develop a respect for animals. The campers' emotional benefits can be an increase in self-confidence once you are able to ride independently. It can give a person an interest outside of oneself and in another living being. The Saskatchewan Abilities Council's mission statement is to "work with people of varying abilities to enhance their independence and participation in the community through vocational, rehabilitation and recreational services". With this therapeutic riding program we will certainly achieve that.

